

Emergency processor support sought on School Lunch irradiation proposal**by Den Murphy on 12/17/02 for www.meatingplace.com**

The Agriculture Department has issued a request for comments on its proposal to buy irradiated foods for commodity purchase programs, including the National School Lunch Program.

Congress has encouraged USDA to include irradiated food in the national school lunch program but has asked the public to comment first. According to insiders, special interest groups have already inundated USDA with the usual anti-irradiation rhetoric.

The industry needs to respond -- and soon, as the deadline for comments is Dec. 20 (Friday).

Processors are encouraged to write a letter today expressing support for irradiation as an option that will help increase the safety of school lunches and provide consumers with another choice.

Here are a few key talking points:

- Food irradiation is endorsed by all leading health organizations including the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, the American Dietetic Association, the American Council on Science & Health and dozens more.
- No food preservation technology has been studied more extensively than irradiation, with more than 500 scientific papers published on its safety and effectiveness during the past 50 years. According to Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research & Policy, more research has been done on irradiation than any other food processing technology -- including canning and freezing.
- If the goal is to stop the spread of food-borne disease, then irradiation will do for ground beef and other foods what pasteurization has done for the dairy industry.
- Irradiation doesn't substitute for good manufacturing practices and will not replace inspection or sanitation procedures already in place. Intervention strategies such as steam pasteurization and organic acid rinses have significantly reduced the incidence of bacterial contamination in beef. Irradiation is an additional step to make food safer -- not a replacement for food-safety interventions already in place.
- Children are especially vulnerable to food-borne illness, and irradiation is an additional step that can be taken to make our food safer and to protect our kids.
- There is strong consumer acceptance of irradiated ground beef in the marketplace. More than 4,000 supermarkets currently sell irradiated ground beef and the product is available at several hundred restaurants and several leading mail order and home delivery food companies.

Fax or e-mail USDA your comments at the following address:

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Livestock and Seed Programs

Agriculture Marketing Service

Stop 0249 Room 2092-S

Washington, DC 20250-0249

Fax: 202/720-3499. E-mail: foodsafetvtechnology@usda.gov

Editor's note: It is suggested that fax or e-mail are preferred in the interests of timeliness, as anti-anthrax procedures still in effect in our nation's capital greatly slow the delivery of surface mail.

To comment on this article, e-mail the editors: mgeditors@meatingplace.com



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